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RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN  
DE RUEHSB #0233/01 0761641  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 171641Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY HARARE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4245  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000233

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/PDPA LALLISON AND BSTRASSBERGER;  
AF/S FOR BWALCH  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR MICHELLE GAVIN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OEXC](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ETTC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF ZIMBABWE MEDIA COVERAGE OF SANCTIONS AND PM CAR CRASH

11. SUMMARY: Extension of U.S. targeted sanctions by President Obama on March 4 and the car crash that killed Susan Tsvangirai both received extensive media coverage in the last two weeks. A significant section of the mainstream media believes that targeted sanctions should ease following the formalization of the all-inclusive government. Government controlled media hostility towards the West continues amid media speculation that the accident that claimed the life of Susan Tsvangirai, the Prime Minister's wife, was a plot against the Prime Minister's life either by the U.S. or ZANU-PF. END SUMMARY.

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COMMENTARY ON SANCTIONS  
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12. The government controlled media's coverage was hostile to the March 4 announcement by President Obama that economic sanctions originally imposed by President Bush will continue for another year.

These media do not argue that the actions of the new government meet the criteria for the removal of these targeted sanctions, but rather that there is no justification for sanctions in the first place. The Herald, March 5, maintains that "if these sanctions are not removed it means the West will be trying to retain some form of heinous influence in our affairs that at a future date will result in the creation of a puppet administration in Zimbabwe." The Herald has labeled the targeted sanctions as "extremely evil, dictatorial and an abortion of justice" (commentary by Assistant News Editor Isdore Guvamombe in The Saturday Herald, March 7). The Herald has pointedly not blamed President Obama for the continuation of sanctions, saying: "Obama's problem is that he has kept diehard remnants of the Bush administration in strategic offices like the Embassy in Harare who are still pushing the old agenda."

13. Even independent media question the sanctions, although in a less sensational manner. Commenting in the New Zimbabwe Blogs (March 7), Joram Nyathi, deputy editor of the privately owned The Zimbabwe Independent, says "the sanctions serve a purpose extraneous to Zimbabwe's interests whether one is MDC or ZANU-PF or non-partisan," adding "there is no point in Obama pretending to see "a threat" posed by little Zimbabwe to America when we know (Vice President Joe) Biden and (Secretary of State) Hillary Clinton are still pursuing their Republican agenda in Zimbabwe." Semi-independent financial weekly The Financial Gazette, March 12, says "further U.S. sanctions (are) detrimental to the inclusive government," but quotes Lovemore Madhuku, constitutional lawyer and civil society leader saying the announcement is just a technical extension: "The Americans do this every year, so people mustn't be worried. There is no way the Americans are going to change their policies over-night."

14. In his inaugural address to Parliament on March 4, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai called for the removal of "restrictive measures." Government controlled media have labeled Tsvangirai's call as "lukewarm" (The Herald, March 16).

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Australian Change in Policy  
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¶15. The US\$10 million aid donation announced by Australia for water, sanitation, and health assistance has been interpreted as a "shift in policy towards Zimbabwe after the formation of the inclusive government" (The Zimbabwe Guardian, March 11). Other independent and government controlled papers shared the view that Australia has broken with the U.S. and EU in deciding to provide non-humanitarian assistance.

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REACTION TO PM CAR CRASH  
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¶16. Government media have alleged a plot by the U.S. and Britain to assassinate Tsvangirai because of displeasure at his joining the unity government. "I bet my last dollar, that 25 years from now, we will read about an abortive mission along Masvingo Road," writes The Herald's Assistant Editor, and notorious ZANU-PF shill, Caesar Zvayi (March 14). The Herald also gave space to the views of Professor Jonathan Moyo, who argued that "the American and British governments, or some of their agents dealing with Zimbabwe, have the motive, incentives and means to derail the inclusive Government through foul play" (The Saturday Herald, March 14). Moyo, whose views were echoed in New Zimbabwe.com, called for an international investigation into the operations of USAID in Zimbabwe.

¶17. In contrast, privately-owned independent media continued to speculate that there was a plot against Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's life by ZANU-PF. The Standard (March 1) argued that

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"the vehicle [that struck Tsvangirai's car] was dispatched under unclear circumstances." The Zimbabwe Independent also called for an enquiry but focused its coverage on the inadequate security protection afforded the PM.

¶18. COMMENT: A sharp divide between the government controlled and private media persists, despite the formation of the unity government. While attacks on the MDC and PM Tsvangirai have been toned down, the West in general, and the U.S. and UK in particular, remain a favorite bogeyman for the state media. On the issue of sanctions, the fact that the private media largely shares the same view, if not the same bombast, as the state media demonstrates the need for us to continue to better explain our sanctions policy. END COMMENT.

MC GEE